

Dek Unu Magazine

Solo Exhibitions of Fine
Photoart Portfolios

December, 2018

Featured Artist

Sonia Goydenko

"Fragments of
Consciousness"

Cover "The Modern Magritte"
All images © Sonia Godyenko



Artist Interview - Sonia Goydenko

Hi, Sonia. Thanks for being December's *Dek Unu*! You are both a photo-artist and a graduate social psychologist.

My interest in social and antisocial human behavior has been present since college, where I received a degree in Psychology. I'm currently at work on a photo project about social media addiction and anxiety disorders, where, unlike the black and white of the "Fragments of Consciousness" portfolio, I'm using color digital photography as my medium. I strive to show the loneliness and restlessness that an urban dweller often experiences. All of my photographs are candid or "accidents" and most of the people in them are not even aware of my existence. My background being in social psychology, I am very interested in how different environments affect and shape our psyche.

New York City is Mecca to so many artists. What do you think of the city and the arts environment there?

I was born in Ukraine, but I grew up in and around New York City so it is my home. There is inspiration lurking around every corner. Older New York City photographers who photographed in the 70s and 80s will sometimes tell you that the city has gotten boring and "too safe". I don't see that. There are plenty of interesting and quirky people and places in the city. Maybe certain locations like Times Square have become more commercial, but bustling street life is still present in the city.

Being an artist in the Big Apple does have its struggles. Most photo galleries and competitions demand at least \$30 just for you to show a couple of your photographs. It may not seem like much at first, but after applying to 10 or 20 of these galleries, you end up shelling out quite a hefty sum. I've learned to thoroughly research the contests and galleries I am applying to.

In terms of support for photography and photographers in New York City, I can say that ICP (The International Center of Photography) has been a place of continued growth for me. I have met and collaborated with many talented photographers there. Although photography is a lonely profession, it's great to have a group of people you can occasionally shoot and discuss your work with.

Your work is powerful because your subjects are not acting or reacting for the camera. How do you manage to stay invisible?

I have curly red hair and like to dress in lots of colors so I am invisible for maybe 3 seconds before my subject takes notice! What I often do is act as if I am photographing something else. Not the subject. I will look around and fiddle with my camera settings. This usually works and the subject forgets about me.

Every photographer works differently and I've tried various methods. I have gone up to people and asked to photograph them, but I always find those photographs to be the worst ones (for me). For me street photography is about capturing the street life that unfolds naturally in front of the photographer. If I were to

approach my subject and start telling them where to stand and how to pose, it would be a different kind of photograph, more like street/environmental portraiture. There are incredible photographers out there who work this way and get amazing results. But for me, I want to capture the candid moments when the subject has no idea they are being watched. There is some beauty to that and it is what attracts me to this kind of photography.

The first photography class I ever took was with renowned street photographer, Harvey Stein. He taught me a lot about photographing people on the street. We've become good friends and I still go out shooting with him from time to time. Vladimir Davidenko, a wonderful painter and photographer, also from Ukraine but residing in Brooklyn, has been instrumental in my development as an artist. He really shares my love for New York City and is always pushing me to stay true to photographing what I find interesting and beautiful.





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The Modern Magritte

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An Urban Lullaby

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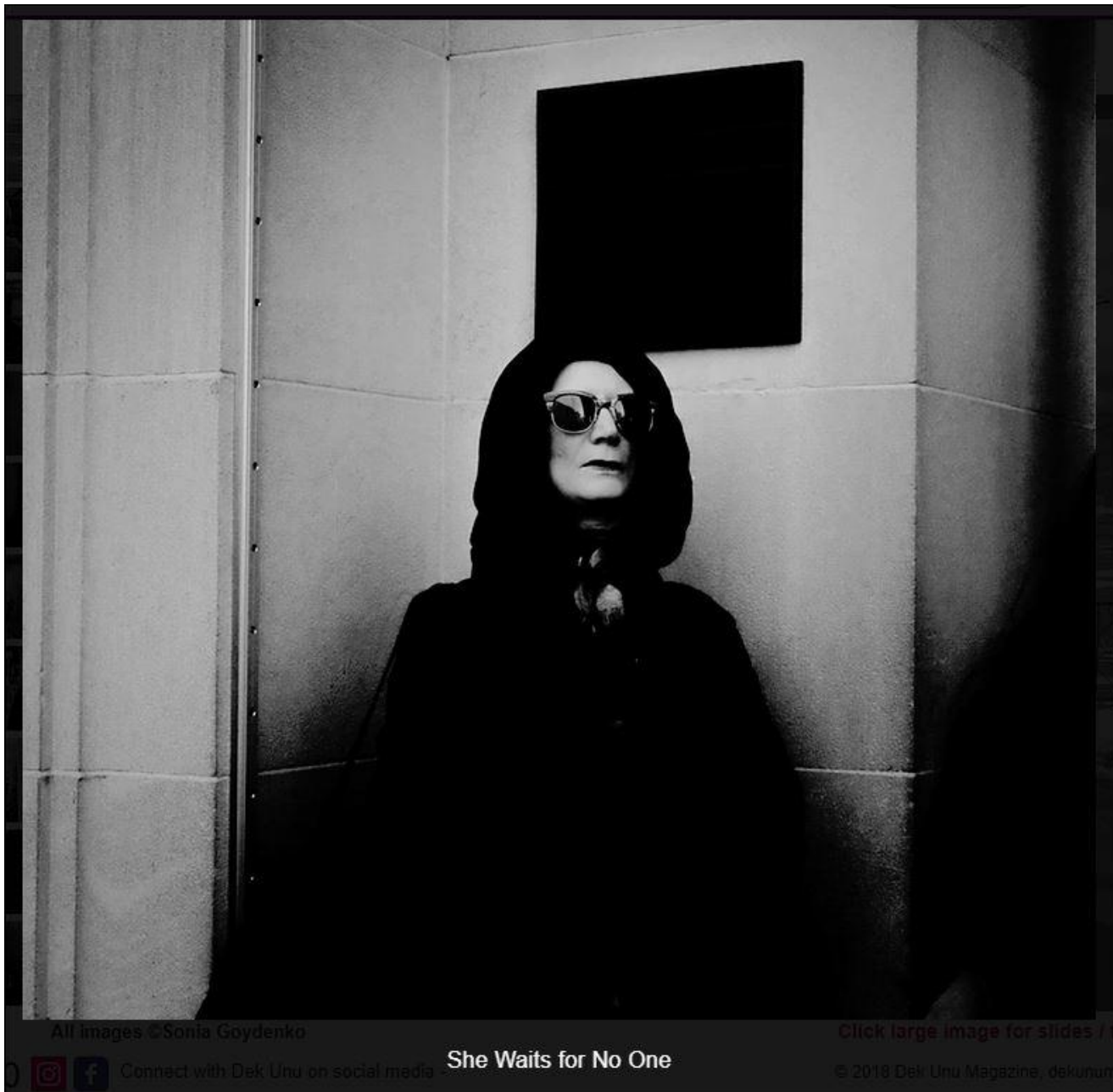
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Mystery Girl

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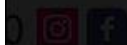
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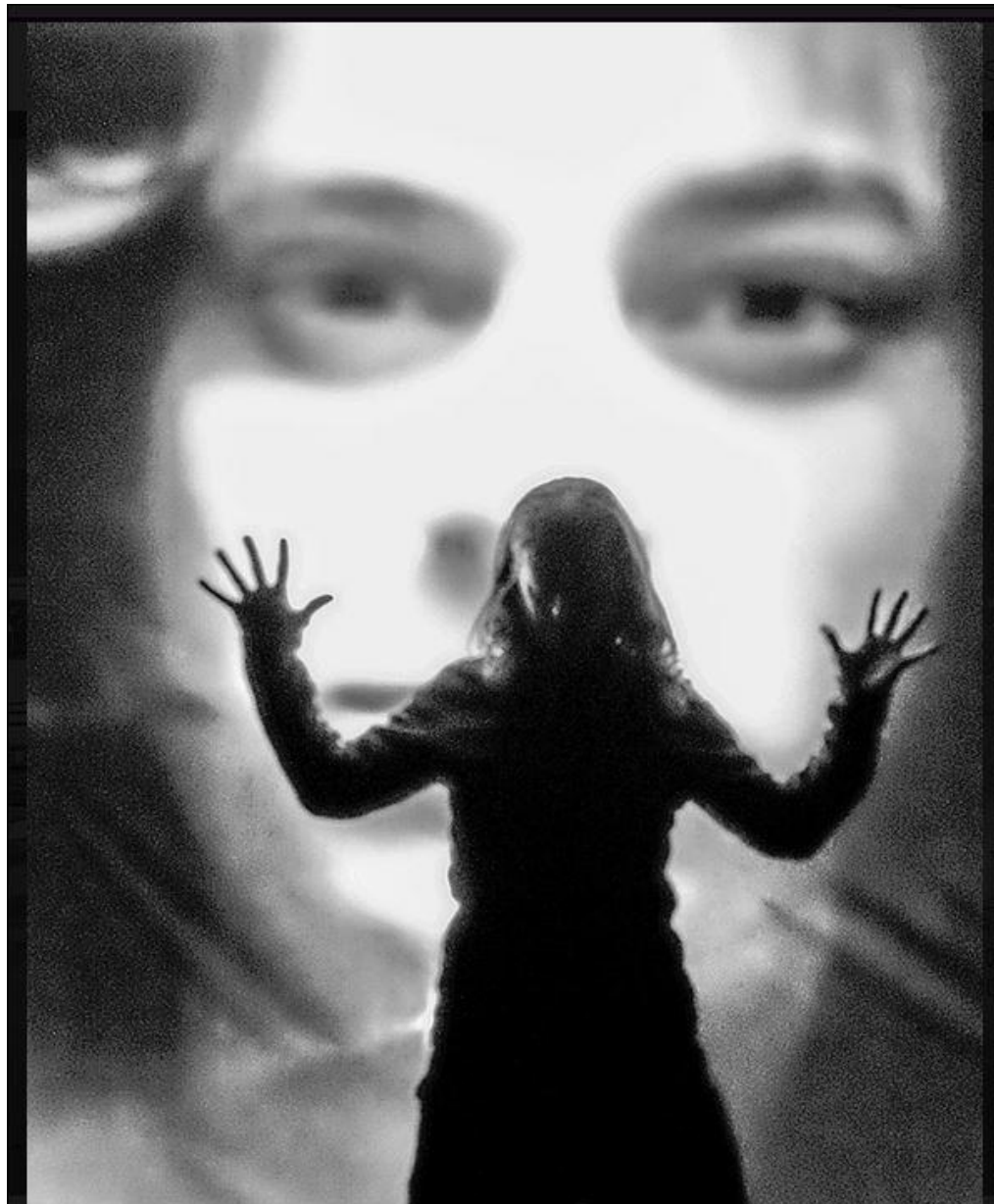
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She Waits for No One

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Touch and See

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The Girl of Christopher Street

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On the New Orleans Streetcar

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A Long Day

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Double Portrait

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Into the Void

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Artist Interview - Sonia Goydenko

You teach photography to beginners. Do you have wisdom that you like to share with students? About the craft? About a life in the arts?

In my classes, I emphasize how photography is storytelling. It can be a story about your friends and family, a story about the environment around you, or the struggles in your daily life. Photography has given me a sense of autonomy that I lacked when I was younger. At the end of the day, it is something that nobody can take away from you. You can be having trouble at home, in a relationship, or just feel conflicted about life in general, but once you step outside with your camera, it's just you and the street. Street photography is a form of meditation for me. When photographing, I lose all sense of an ego. The troubles I have to deal with in my personal life and the future ahead of me all fall away. I become keenly aware of my surroundings. Color, shape, light, shadow, even smells. My gaze widens. All I have is this moment in front of me. And when I see something beautiful appear: a gesture that touches me, a facial expression that reveals much more than words, a juxtaposition of beauty with decay, I press the shutter.

Do you remember the first "decent" photograph you made... the one that got you excited about photography?

Yes! I do remember! It will sound silly, but the first photograph I ever took on the first camera I ever got was amazing!

My stepfather bought me a Nikon Coolpix P7000 Point and Shoot camera and the first photograph I took with it was a portrait of him. I immediately loved the photograph. It was a picture of him smoking and seemed to capture something about him that I was



familiar with but had never seen photographed. I thought "Wow. This little camera thingy can do that!!?" I then ventured out to the Lower East Side and photographed anything that caught my attention. Been doing that ever since.

Your sense of composition and timing point to training in the visual arts. Art school? Photo classes?

I mentioned classes at ICP, but being on the street, constantly shooting, is what really trained me in the art of photography. I guess you could say I have been studying images my entire life. Informally. I have been obsessed with cinema ever since I was a little girl. I would rewatch movies hundreds of times, paying attention to every little detail until I pretty much memorized films frame by frame. Wim Wenders' *Paris, Texas* has the most beautiful cinematography of any film I have ever seen. There is something about the macabre that draws me in to the films of David Lynch. They're beautiful to watch, but there is an aspect of the grotesque in them. Thought-provoking films like *American Beauty*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, and *Memento* are also among my favorites.

So, cinema and constant exposure to art museums as a child (often against my will, forced by my parents) are what I believe to have formed my "photographer's eye".

Have you had a favorite class at ICP?

Yes. Karen Marshall's "From Intent To Edit: Establishing A Relationship With Your Work" was my favorite class at ICP. The way that she discusses photography is mesmerizing. She's a very eloquent and honest teacher and approaches every student's work with an openness and desire to really help the student understand why they are creating the work in the first place.

From the community at ICP, I have a few photographers who I will occasionally go shooting with and discuss photography with, but I find too much of that distracts me from my work. It becomes too much thinking about photography and not enough photographing. When I want some inspiration I head to a museum or to Strand Bookstore and look at photobooks of Henri Cartier-Bresson or Harry Gruyaert. I'm currently reading *The Photographer's Playbook* which is filled with photography assignments and ideas from various famous photographers. I'm enjoying it very much.



Artist Interview - Sonia Goydenko

Some of your "street" photos are not of people!

Yes, sometimes the subject that catches my eye is architectural. For my architectural series, I mostly photograph from bridges (Queensboro Bridge and Williamsburg Bridge). Both are great vantage points for architectural photography. Brooklyn Bridge is beautiful but there are usually way too many tourists around.



"Sunset Over LIC", ©Sonia Goydenko

What should we know about your equipment, software, tools?

My architectural color photography is shot all with, believe it or not, my first camera, the Nikon Coolpix P7000 point and shoot. The zoom on it is perfect and I really love the color profile on the Nikons. I have also recently transitioned to shooting with film and bought a Minolta X370. I'm enjoying the change very much.

All of the images in the "Fragments of Consciousness" series are from my Fuji XE2 mirrorless camera paired with the 18-55mm kit zoom lens. I originally bought a Canon DSLR but found myself

never taking it out of my backpack. I then traded it in for the Fuji XE2. I think it all depends on how you work. If I were doing formal portraiture I would probably be using either a full frame digital camera or a medium format film camera. Since I need to be quick and invisible (which I'm not very good at being since I dress quite ostentatiously so people often take notice of me), I work with a small, light, silent camera. I use Lightroom on iMac. Photoshop is too much. I do very little post-production. In the subway, I often use my iPhone. I find that I can get very close to strangers on the subways and photograph them without being noticed.



"Up to No Good" © Sonia Goydenko



Artist Interview - Sonia Goydenko

Your cover image, "The Modern Magritte" is a knockout. It looks like it could almost be a photomontage...



The Magritte image was taken in Taos, New Mexico. I was visiting friends there and we decided to go to a music concert on a mountaintop (something they do quite often there). It was breathtaking. After a couple hours we got hungry and drove into town. While on line at a burger place, waiting for my food, I noticed this man in a hat, eating a

cheeseburger and staring off into the distance. I love photographing people in hats (mainly because nobody really wears them anymore and for me they are like a relic from another time). I stood behind the man, bent down a bit and photographed him a few times. I maybe made about 3 or 4 shots on my Fuji. When I came home I converted it into black and white and was amazed by how surreal and "knockout" the image was. I loved it immediately. The shape of his head, the mountains in the background, the mystery in the environment of the photograph. It all came together for me. It's one of my favorite images.

"Urban Lullaby" is so composed you must have planned it.

"An Urban Lullaby" was something that photographers often see on the subway and, if they're lucky, they can capture it. It was taken late at night and a young man was sitting across from me, sleeping. I took a few test shots of him while the train was moving and loved the motion blur in



the background. After taking a few more, I noticed that an advertisement for a movie or TV show was visible in the back. The advertisement depicts a group of ominous-looking men staring into the distance. I loved the way they are placed in the photo because it looks like they are watching him and he is completely clueless (passed out!). This street photo was really a gift for me. The guy sleeping I planned to take, but the serious men in the back were completely unplanned. Little accidents like this are what makes street photography so exciting.

How's business? What are your plans for the future? A new project, exhibit, book, travel?

I was in a show at Umbrella Arts Gallery in the East Village in March and I was just named a winner at *LoosenArt Magazine* and will be showing a photo in an exhibit in Rome, January, 2019.

I'm currently working on my subway series which will become a book once it is complete. I am going through my travel photographs from my recent trip to Marseille. And, finally, I have started a new project concerning social media addiction and anxiety disorders.

I fell in love with travel a couple years ago when I went on a 3-month solo trip through Western Europe. Although I've never been back to Ukraine, I hope to go soon. Ukraine has changed in many ways since the fall of the Soviet Union and it would be interesting to see where I was born and where my family grew up.

I would like to travel more in the U.S. and photograph people in towns and small cities. I am very interested in people who live differently from me and travel photography is a great way to explore that. Bieke Depoorter, an amazing photographer from Belgium, has a project titled "Ou Menya" for which she traveled on the Trans-Siberian Train for a month and stayed with complete strangers that she met in villages and photographed them. I think that by traveling that way, and seeing how different people live, you end up learning a lot more about yourself and about the world.

Thanks, Sonia! Your links so we can stay in touch?

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